

# St. Thomas More Academy

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Wednesday, June 18,2008

The Most Reverend Edwin F. O'Brien  
Archbishop of Baltimore  
320 Cathedral Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Your Excellency,

The Board of Directors of Saint Thomas More Academy has met, and after extensive and prayerful deliberations passed a resolution to request a meeting with you to discuss some of the issues in your proposal that are of concern to us. We genuinely seek to be accepted as members of the Church family within the Archdiocese of Baltimore and feel that we can resolve these issues at such meeting.

The Board of Directors wishes to discuss the following:

1. Implementation of a program that is home based and in alignment with the Pontifical Guidelines on chastity
2. Clarification of policies and regulations relating to recognized independent Catholic Schools

Please accept our resolution as a very considered response to your letter outlining the conditions required by the Archdiocese for our acceptance as a Catholic school. If you will allow, I would like to brief you on some of our considerations leading to our resolution. As Your Excellency may expect, our discussion reflected the gamut of experience of our board members, and while spirited, was never heated. The expectations of our constituents, the integrity of the school, and our mission to educate our children, and our respect for the Archdiocesan efforts superseded any personal agendas. Our focus and commitment is to be accepted by the Archdiocese.

Our School was established in 2000 to fill a perceived need in terms of classrooms and for a choice in Catholic elementary education in Frederick County. From our inception, Catholicism has been the primary guiding principle to which we have aspired. Prayer, selfless hard work, and the blessings of the Lord have helped us build a thriving Catholic educational community. Then and now a significant number of our parents have been drawn to our school because we do not offer "sex education" as part of our curriculum. While the Board acknowledges the motives for the requirement of this curriculum in general, we would humbly contend that the pontifical guidelines do not mandate that it be a part of classroom curriculum, but rather is more appropriately and effectively taught as the responsibility of the parents. To that end, we propose training of parents as the better means of providing the requirement to our students.

Our confidence in the spirit and presence of Christ in our school community has been affirmed by the Archdiocesan team's unanimous recommendation for approval, and more importantly, the glowing results of the parent survey done by the team. We feel that the survey speaks volumes as it reveals a consistent above average evaluation of the academy in the areas of Catholic principles. Unfortunately, because STMA is not accepted as a Catholic school, our parish priests are not permitted to celebrate mass, or acknowledge our Sacramental formation curriculum. The need to celebrate mass in our school has been the overriding motivation for the board to seek "recognition."

The language in the letter states STMA will be answerable to the superintendent and must adhere to all policies and regulations of an archdiocesan school. We understood that as an independent school operating within the diocese, that we will retain our autonomy in the internal management of the school (pursuant to Canon 806.1). We are requesting clarification of what policies and guidelines we are subject to in order to ensure we maintain our independence. We are not seeking to become an Archdiocesan school; we wish to be recognized as an independent Catholic school pursuant to Canon 803-1.3. At the same time, the Board appreciates the Archdiocese's responsibility to monitor and remain assured of our continuing adherence to Catholic principles and practices. Your Excellency, the regular and welcome presence of our parish priests in the school should provide first hand oversight of our community.

We are given to understand that our recognition process is a first for the Archdiocese, and acknowledge the importance of any precedents that may be set in this process. We do not seek to complicate or prolong the recognition process, and therefore humbly request your meeting with representatives of the STMA board to resolve our situation.

Sincerely,

Dr. James A. Merkel President,  
Board of Directors Saint Thomas  
More Academy